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# Weaving Grammar and Mechanics into Writer's Workshop

## C H A P T E R

# 3

*The picture has a dollop of peanut butter on one edge, a smear of grape jelly on the other, and an X across the whole thing. I cut it out of a magazine for homework when I was six years old. "Look for words that begin with W," my teacher, Mrs. Evans, had said.*

*She was the one who marked the X, spoiling my picture. She pointed. "This is a picture of family, Hollis. A mother, M, a father, F, a brother, B, a sister, S. They're standing in front of their house, H. I don't see a W word here."*

*I opened my mouth to say: How about a W for wish, or a W for want, or W for "Wouldn't it be lovely," like the song the music teacher had taught us?*

*But Mrs. Evans was at the next table by that time, shushing me over her shoulder.*

Patricia Reilly Giff, *Pictures of Hollis Woods*

As well-intentioned as editing marks may be, I know how most students see these corrections: as X's over their souls, their desires, their thoughts. They view markings on their writing much like six-year-old Hollis Woods does in the novel excerpt above.

Often by the time students reach middle school, they hate writing. With the testing mania of late, the problem has only worsened.

Since grammar and mechanics are means to effective writing, I know the most important activity my students can engage in is composing text. Student

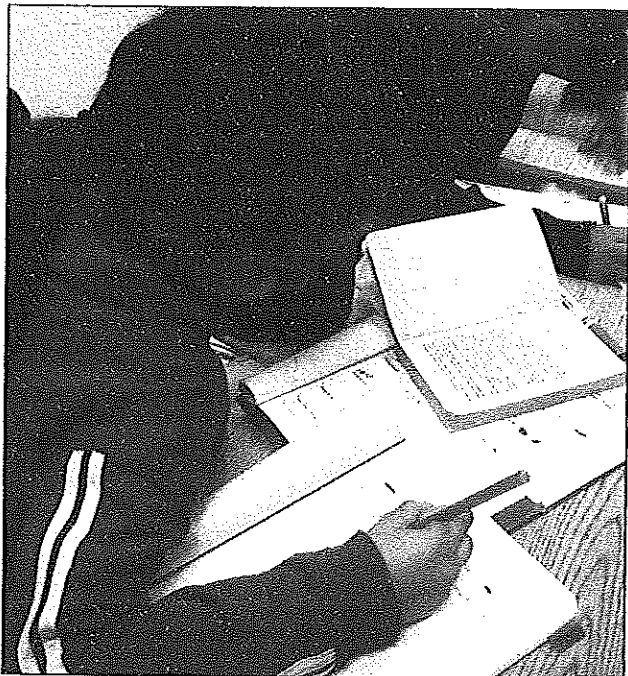


Figure 3.1 Student Writes in Writer's Notebook

writers should first experiment, imitate, interact, notice, and revise text without ever hearing these inspiration-killing words: *revision*, *grammar*, *editing*. Maybe we shouldn't even use the labels at first. Instead of telling students to revise, use correct grammar, or edit their mistakes, I begin by showing them how to create powerful writing.

For me, the writing process is not about students memorizing the names of the steps, especially since they are situation dependent. I try not to put my classes or students on what my mama used to call "auto-fold." After fifteen towels, you don't even pay attention any more, you just fold. The writing process begins with paying attention to experiences and recalling details, and ends with paying attention to our mechanics. I don't want my students to write on auto-fold.

Writing process labels, such as *prewriting*, *drafting*, *revising*, *editing*, and *publishing*, are dead

without daily action, moving in and out of all the phases in true recursive fashion. It is in the experience, the interaction, and the trial and error that students learn how to write well.

I give students the advice of William Carlos Williams: "Write what's in front of your nose." I remind them, "You don't have to write about big trips to Disney World, though you certainly can. If all you ever write about are the things that happen to you at home or at school, that's enough. Ordinary things. You're welcome to write about anything, but the places and spaces where you spend time, that's where you'll know the details. That's how you can take readers anywhere, make them see and feel."

In Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Diary* (2003), the narrator keeps echoing these two lines, "Everything is self-portrait. Everything is a diary" (p. 3).

I often find that kids don't think their experiences are what I am looking for. When Ramiro writes about the time he hit his head on a brick flower box, it's important. Through conferring with Ramiro, I show my interest by asking questions, reveling in the specific details of how the blood in his mouth tasted like pennies.

I may even have him write that on a sentence strip and stick it up for others to see. "We've all tasted blood in our mouths, but the way Ramiro says it tasted like pennies, I can taste it all over again."

To help students see the connections between craft, revision, and mechanics, I start by nudging students to try new techniques, to reread writing, to hear and see beautiful and effective writing. Simply put, when students write, they begin to move toward correctness. And let's face it:

Writing is the life of the composition party. The best place to begin to make these connections is in the writer's notebook.

## Writer's Notebook as Playground: Composing, Revising, and Experimenting with Mechanics

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*I think of the journal as a witness, a repository, and playground. It is where I begin things or bring thoughts to some kind of clarity.*

Dorothy Allison, *The Writer's Notebook*

Writer's notebook, journal, notebook, living book, log, daybook, composition book—whatever you call it, writers of any age need a safe place to spill themselves onto the page. A place where writing won't get marked up by anyone except, perhaps, themselves. I let students have recess on the page, the sweet freedom to romp with thoughts, cavort with commas, and monkey around with syntax. What better playground do we have than the writer's notebook? This is the repository, the organizer, the placeholder, the idea catcher, the canvas to experiment and create on, the place to be wrong and to be wrong boldly. Writers' notebooks last.

Every thing in the writer's notebook is in process all the time. It is a place to return—to mine and refine, polish and relish, reread and rewrite. Maybe we should think of it as a rewriter's notebook, a reviser's notebook. Writing folders are great for holding finished pieces or parts of pieces in process, but the notebook holds a progressive record of the year and keeps all those scraps and loose-end responses sewn together, a deposit of gold that can be mined all year long. Students can return to its pages again and again, under your direction or of their own volition, to create and play with language by freewriting, going back and applying a new craft technique to a previously written piece, or quickly rereading a piece of writing for a targeted edit. But with all this playing, the challenge is to systematize what I teach when it comes to grammar and mechanics.

## Setting Up a Writer's Notebook

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Before students write their first word in the writer's notebook, it needs to be carefully set up for optimal use as a repository. I buy composition books in bulk at back-to-school sales and give them to students who can't find or afford them.

Over the last few years, I have formulated some guidelines that work for me in constructing the writer's playground. These notebooks are an essential tool to help my students become sentence stalkers (Spandel 2003).

First of all, I find it essential to spend a little time upfront emphasizing how important the writer's notebooks will be in our class. Students must get a sense of my reverence for the notebooks, my expectations for their care.

Once all the students have their notebooks, I instruct students step-by-step on setting up the writer's notebook:

1. Never tear out a page of your notebook. Never. I tell my students, "If you think you must tear out a sheet, see me."
2. Leave a fly page up front, just like in books.
3. Number pages only on the right-hand side, starting after the fly page.
4. Write the page number on the bottom right-hand side. This takes time, but it is a must. Think of the time saved later when a student can put a sticky note on the cover: *Read entry on pages 31–32*. Instead of dutifully thumbing through a notebook, I can turn immediately to the correct pages.
5. Only write on the right-hand pages of the notebook. Keep the left-hand pages blank for revising, rethinking, and tinkering with the facing numbered page. This saves space for the experimenting we will do with craft and mechanics in the notebook.

After students have numbered their pages, they are ready to set up sections in their notebooks. The following sections help students and me keep track of the varied purposes of a writer's notebook.

## Beginning with Writing

The first section, "Writing," is by far the largest section of the notebook. Students freewrite, respond, prewrite, create, shape, take notes, glue materials from our quick daily writer's secret work, and play with their writing here. Each entry should be dated and given at least a one-word title with some sort of connection to the text that follows.

My students' most fluent and complex writing often comes in focused freewriting. In *Writing with Power*, Peter Elbow writes, "Frequent freewriting exercises help you learn to simply get on with it and not be held back by worries about whether these words are good words or right words" (1998b, p. 14).

Freewriting proper, in its purist Elbowian form, asks writers to write: "Simply force yourself to write without stopping for ten minutes" (p. 13). Focused freewriting, on the other hand, gives students a jumping off point. Perhaps this is a word or group of words, such as *neighbors* in one instance and *teasing* or *bullying* in another. The words may hold a theme, a feeling, a memory, an opinion, but they should definitely be connected to the text read as a stimulus. Writers are then encouraged to let their thinking guide them: "Just write. Go wherever the writing takes you."

If I tell my kids to freewrite, most students stall out after a few minutes, but if I read a stimulating piece of literature first, they write and write. Students often use techniques that the writer used in the stimulus text. I give them some ideas of what they can write about but let them go where their passions take them.

On the first day of school, I read an excerpt from *Autobiography of a Face* by Lucy Grealy (1994). Instead of lecturing on why we don't make fun of each other or bully in my class (or anywhere else), I share an excerpt from Grealy's memoir. Many reluctant writers don't want to share for fear of being made fun of. I find that establishing safety in the first day or so of class lays this fear to rest.

In the memoir, Grealy is diagnosed with bone cancer in her jaw. The cancer and chemotherapy eat away at her jawbone, collapsing her face. She's in great pain, her face is deformed, and now she has to start junior high school.

I ask students, "Where will be the hardest place for her to be?" I let them answer, giving me a lens into the places that feel least safe to them. Without fail, someone always says the lunchroom. I read aloud the following passage, stopping often for students to make connections to their experiences.

*Having seen plenty of teen movies with their promise of intrigue and drama, I had been looking forward to going to the lunchroom. As it happened, I sat down next to a table full of boys.*

*They pointed openly and laughed, calling out loudly enough for me to hear, "What on earth is that?" "That is the ugliest girl I have ever seen." I knew in my heart that their comments had nothing to do with me, that this was all about them appearing tough and cool to their friends. But these boys were older than the ones in grade school, and for the very first time I realized they were passing judgment on my suitability, or lack of it, as a girlfriend. . . . The same group took to seeking me out and purposely sitting near me day after day, even when I tried to camouflage myself by sitting in the middle of a group. They grew bolder, and I could hear them plotting to send someone to sit across from me. I'd look up from my food and there would be a boy slouching awkwardly in a red plastic chair, innocently asking me my name. Then he'd ask me how I got to be so ugly. At this the group would burst into laughter, and my listener would saunter back, victorious. (pp. 124–25)*

When I am finished reading the passage a second time, I ask the students, "What words or phrases stick with you?" I write their answers on the whiteboard.

"Why do you think the red plastic chair stuck with Anna?" I ask.

"Well, you could see a red plastic chair in your head when you read it," one student offers.

### Freewriting Rules!

1. Write. Just write. Keep your hand moving. (The only way to do freewriting wrong is to not write or to quit early.)
2. Experiment with spelling, punctuation, and grammar. (This as opposed to "don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar." Though we shouldn't worry about it, we should attempt to do the best we can.)
3. Go wherever your writing (thinking on the page) takes you. (If another story comes to mind, maybe that's what you should be writing about. Go for it.)
4. Be specific. (As you teach strategies like naming concrete nouns and snapshots, encourage those things in first-draft freewriting by praising them when read aloud.)
5. As Natalie Goldberg says, "You are free to write the worst junk in America" (1990, p. 4). (Students need to know that everyone has doubts about their writing. Allowing some writing to be garbage [Elbow 1998a] allows our writing to flow and good things to emerge.)

Figure 3.2 Freewriting Rules!

"So, adding specific details like a red plastic chair added pictures to Lucy Grealy's writing." Then we move on to larger questions and discussions that will serve in building a writer's community and writing with snapshots (Lane 1992) and details.

"Why do you think people make fun of each other? How do you think it affects others?" I share how I still remember mean things people said to me in elementary school—some thirty years later. "I will stand up against bullying in my classroom, and I expect you to refrain from it and stand up to it by saying cut it out or changing the subject. If it's a problem, see me, and we will work it out."

After sufficient discussion, I say, "Freewriting will be an important part of our writing in this class, and something you'll do often in your writer's notebook." I quickly explain how to freewrite, showing a transparency of freewriting rules (see Figure 3.2).

"Write *Bullying* at the top of your page. Skip a line and write about something you've done, experienced, or have seen happen. Start with the idea of bullying and go where the writing takes you." Pointing to the list on the wall, I say, "Remember what Lucy Grealy did to make pictures and images in our heads. Try to add specific details."

As we share, an important discussion ensues. One teacher I worked with did this activity later in the year, and told me the story of a girl, formerly the class punching bag, who started receiving anonymous notes in her locker. They were kind. The student told her teacher that people had almost completely stopped teasing her. We are building a writing community. But more than that, I am building a pattern that will repeat throughout the year. Read, reflect, write, share and process, re-enter and share, clean up. This is a mini-writing process that gets reluctant students writing and sharing.

### Embedding Mechanics Instruction in Notebook Freewrites—*Bedhead*

I like to kick off my students' thinking about mechanics as special effects devices with Margie Palatini's *Bedhead* (2000). To show my students the power of punctuation for shaping meaning and voice, I read aloud *Bedhead*. In the story, Oliver wakes up with his hair going every which way, a seriously funny bad-hair day. His family tries to help him tame it, but alas, they are

only able to stuff it under a cap. To make matters worse, when Oliver gets to school, it's picture day and he can't wear a cap.

I don't want to exclusively use one or two sentences to illustrate principles. It's important for students to see how punctuation works to hold and connect larger texts together. This charming picture book makes my middle schoolers laugh out loud. As I read, a few even repeat the echoed line, "like a cat's coughed-up fur ball." After the first reading, kids' faces light up and they initially respond with their own "hairror" stories.

While the topic is still hot, I write the word *Hair* on the board. I share about the time I shaved off half an eyebrow the night before I had to speak to four hundred teachers. "That's what I am going to write about. You can write about how long your sister takes to do her hair, like Ashley described, or whatever comes to your mind. Remember, with freewrites you start with the idea of hair and write the whole time, and you can't get it wrong as long as you keep writing."

"Open your writer's notebook, put today's date, and write *Hair* across the top." I keep talking, "Wherever the writing takes you, go with it. Just keep writing. The key word is *hair*." After most kids have titled their pages, I say, "On your marks. Get set. Write!"

After seven or so minutes, longer if I can get away with it, we stop writing after I say "You have one minute to come to a stopping place." We share our freewrites aloud. When students share, I always try to model pointing to something specific they did in their writing—a clear image, dialogue, humor, sentence fluency. "Reread that last sentence, Crystal."

"*I stood there, staring at the mirror, wondering if the burgundy would ever come out of my hair before the bus came,*" Crystal reads.

"Wow," I interject. "What sticks with you? What do you like about what Crystal did?" With this question students easily point out the strong bits of writing that stuck with them. They're becoming literary critics and they don't even know it. Of course, if no one can articulate a strength, I do.

The next day I read *Bedhead* again. I think repeated reading of short, engaging texts goes a long way in teaching kids what makes up good writing. By reading a text more than once, we create a shared text that we can refer to again and again—a mentor text that can show us craft and mechanics techniques. This repeated revisiting, viewing all the different layers in the text, deepens students' understanding of how to read like writers. On the second reading of *Bedhead*, I stop to demonstrate how the punctuation drives the way I read it. I type a few of the pages on transparencies. The students and I discuss what the punctuation is doing in these passages:

- Ellipses build tension.
- Short sentences and fragments fly off the tongue.
- Long sentences roll around giving us a feel for the action.

- Dialogue is between quotation marks, telling me when a person is speaking.
- Italics tell me to emphasize a word: "Way out of control."

Returning to our freewrites in our writer's notebooks from the day before, I direct students to play around with their text, imitating any of Palatini's punctuation or conventions. First, I model on the overhead with my freewrite. "So let's use Margie Palatini's examples to help us shape our stories. You don't have to do it just like Palatini did." I write:

*It's midnight. I'm nervous, and my eyebrows suddenly look way too bushy.*

*I pluck. No, that's not going to be fast enough. I reach for the scissors. No, I can't hold them that way and still cut. But then I see them . . . the clippers.*

*Sure I have to look great to present in front of 400 teachers and the only thing standing between me and perfection are my . . . BUSHY BROWS.*

*Buzz. Yes. Buzz. Yes. Buzz. Oops. No more buzz. No more middle in my left eyebrow. I stare in the mirror: one bushy brow and one half-n-half brow.*

"Play around with the punctuation in new ways." I look around the room at all of their faces. "Ask yourself what effect does it have? Go to it, and we'll share in a minute." As they start writing, I say, "Take risks. Be bold. We can always play with it more."

When students read aloud their modified freewrites, we celebrate students' use of punctuation. To do this optimally, I look at the paper as the student reads it aloud. If a teaching point happens, I write it on the board. "Look at this, Jeremy used a sentence with an introductory phrase at the beginning."

On the overhead I write, *Whenever I hear the alarm clock go off, I race to the bathroom before my sister takes it over for the next hour.* "Jeremy knew that he needed to set off sentences that start with *when* or *whenever* with a comma. Do you agree with where Jeremy inserted the comma?"

"How'd you know to put the comma after *off*, Jeremy?"

"Well, it just doesn't sound right with it someplace else." Maybe we try it in another place, maybe we rave about him using the word *race* instead of *run*. We take a few minutes to see what is right with student writing. Perhaps someone else uses a fragment effectively or adds dialogue or hyphenated adjectives. We celebrate what punctuation does, how it affects the reading of the text, and anything else well crafted. If a mistake is made, I weigh the sensitivity of the student and the importance and ease of correction. We can talk about it



then or later, or ideally, I may reteach the point and have the students make their own corrections.

If I don't have time to capture all the good things a student has done, I hand out a sentence strip and a marker and ask the student to write the sentence on the strip. I can make an impromptu bulletin board titled *The Power of Punctuation*.

Of course, by processing these texts, students are going to see other valuable writer's craft techniques besides punctuation: alliteration, repetition, dialogue, and so on. That is a problem I am willing to live with in a longer lesson. I know that learning occurs at many levels in a weblike fashion, that new learning traces over itself and back again in new situations. Hearing dialogue, I may focus on the voice of it one time, and on another occasion, I may focus on the punctuation marks. Each new learning continually traces and retraces, firming up the mesh of what makes effective writing. Students literally soak up more than punctuation, and that's what I want: kids soaking up punctuation in the context of effective writing, their own and that of others.

For example, Simmy's hair story became a bit more focused with revision. She worked on correcting her spelling errors and tried to use punctuation to tell her story and break it up into chunks. She used an ellipsis to build humor and a pause at the end. She added dialogue marks when prompted by the wall chart and a re-reading of *Bedhead* (see Figure 3.3).

If you like to ride the wave of student interest, and they want more about hair, the next day you might want to continue with adding to the freewrites. For example, read *Hairs* (1997) by Sandra Cisneros. It uses sensory detail and similes with abandon in simple, elegant ways. Have students go back to their freewrites and add this kind of detail, or simply have them freewrite about their families' hair. What special effects did they create in their writing? Students can go back and add to their freewrites as many times as it's effective. In fact, they often find seeds for longer pieces.

### Hair

My hair is so easy to put up, but I kind of got tired of my hair being so good. So, last year, when it was a hot day, I wore my black hat that said, "Not another bad hair day," and for the hair part, I teased it so it will look like I woke up on the wrong side of the bed. I went to school; all the guys were waiting for me. Everybody was in their favorite hats. I went over. "Yo, Simmy. What happened to your hair?" the guys said.

"Read my hat stooges!"

*Not another bad hair day.*

I took off the hat, and a piece of hair was sticking up and the teased part started expanding all of a sudden. One, two, three of them started laughing. I told them I did it to make them laugh. But most of them did not believe me, even if it was true . . . or was it?

Figure 3.3 Simmy's "Hair" Story

## The Writer's Eye (I): Lists of Things I Can Write About

The "Writer's Eye (I)" section of the writer's notebook serves dual purposes:

1. Students write about the life they've observed with their own eyes, writer's eyes.
2. Students start a collection of the people, places, games, hobbies, interests, and so forth that they know well.

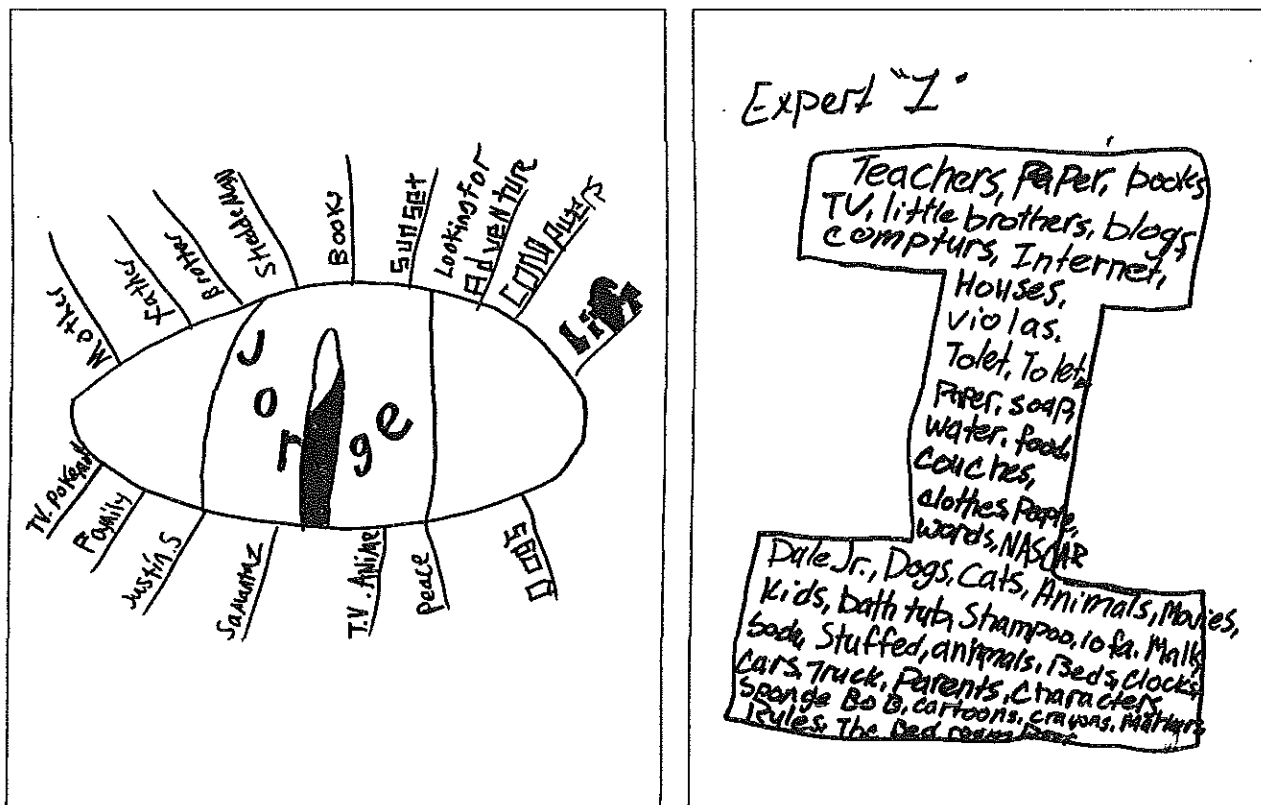


Figure 3.4 Student Writer's Eye and Writer's I Examples

This is the space where I want to let the students know I value who they are, where they come from, and what they know. Tanesha may know a lot about her brother Roshon because she sees him every day. Roshon is part of Tanesha's life, the "I" and the "eye." So Roshon is someone who could go in Tanesha's Writer's Eye (I) list. When we tell kids to use their writer's eye, we are referring both to their noticing capabilities as well as to their personal experiences.

On the first page of the Writer's Eye (I) section of their writer's notebooks, I give students two choices of how to decorate it with words. I model both. "This graphic organizer will take up one page. You are going to list all the things in this world that you know well. This list is going to be called your Writer's Eye or Writer's I."

I show an overhead of each graphic organizer. Both have the possessive Writer's across the top of the page, but the Eye has a big eye drawn and each of the lashes act as a line off a web, while the I has a huge letter I with a fat center, providing writing space in the middle for a list (see Figure 3.4). I allow students to be creative here as long as they leave space for their lists—that's nonnegotiable.

Students draw the eye or I figure. I remind them again, "Make sure it takes up the whole page. You need space to write in it or around it."

Students begin the list of all the things they know: *The Simpsons*, Sony PlayStation 2, hobbies, interests, family members, friends, how to get in trouble, Math, and so on. Whether it's things at school or at home, students should list all the things they know and see most every day. Periodically, I direct students to review this list, adding and deleting as they see fit.

## Craft/Mechanics Connections Through the Writer's Eye (I)

*When I Was Little* is my answer to all students who say, "I don't have anything to write about."

"Oh, really," I reply. *When I Was Little: A Four-Year-Old's Memoir of Her Youth* (1993) by Jamie Lee Curtis is a lively picture book that sparks memories by reflecting on eating Cheetos, naptime, floaties, and time-outs. The text follows an easy-to-imitate pattern. I read it aloud.

Afterward, I ask, "What phrase is repeated again and again?"

"When I was little," returns a chorus of voices.

"Take out your writer's notebook and turn to The Writer's Eye (I) section. Is everybody in the Writer's Eye section? Now, I want you to turn to the first empty page after your first Writer's Eye (I) list.

"On the top of the first line, I want you to write today's date. Then, skip a line and write *When I Was Little List* as the title. (I model each step on the overhead as I explain.)

"We are going to make a list of memories that all start with four words. Guess what they are?"

As the class chants, "When I was little," I write the words to start my list on the overhead: *When I was little, I fell into the toilet.* "I am brainstorming by starting off every thing on my list with *When I was little.*"

"Does anyone notice something else I did that we will all need to do each time on our lists?"

"You put something after it," Damien offers.

"Yes, Damien, what did I put after it?"

"That you fell in the toilet."

"Right, I put what happened when I was little. Anything else, class?" I tap on the overhead very near the comma.

"You put a comma after *little.*"

"That's right. We put a comma after *little.*" (We'll follow up with why at the end of the lesson because we need to get listing.)

"Now it's your turn. Brainstorm a list and start every memory with *When I was little.* Don't forget your comma. List as many as you can! You have four minutes—go." I continue listing on the overhead for two more entries; then

I turn off the overhead and circulate. As long as almost everybody is listing, I extend the time.

"Now tell a person near you what's on your list. You have five minutes."

After five minutes I ask, "What did you hear?" I take a few responses. "I got so many more ideas when I heard other people's lists. Let's add more to our lists. You have three minutes."

After three minutes I say, "Let's look back at our lists. Did everyone remember to use commas and to put a period at the end of each sentence? Check and fix. One minute. Go!"

"Looking over your list, do you see anything that's connected? If so, draw lines between them." I model on the overhead.

"Now go back and circle one sentence or a group of connected sentences on your list." I, of course, circle *When I was little, I fell in the toilet*.

"Turn to the first section of your writer's notebook and find the next clean page. Write today's date above the first line. Skip a line and write the title of the list: *When I Was Little*. Skip one more line and copy down the sentence or sentences you circled in the Writer's Eye (I) section. As soon as you have that down, continue freewriting for eight to ten minutes. You can't do it wrong as long as you keep writing. If you run completely dry, refer back to your list and write more. Write the entire time." Students share writing with a partner first, then a few share with the class.

I follow up with some mechanics instruction at the end of the class or first thing at the next class meeting. "So you told me I needed a comma after *When I was little*, but, at the time, I didn't ask my irritating question: Why? Why? Why do we put the comma after the *little*?"

Finally Natalie ventures a safe answer, "Because it's correct."

"Yes, it is indeed correct, Natalie, but why? Listen to me read it aloud. *When I was little [pause], I fell in the toilet.*"

"You paused!" Matthew blurts.

"True. The comma told me to pause. There are several words that, when they are located at the beginning of a sentence, signal you to use a comma to separate the introductory phrase from the rest of the sentence. They are comma causers."

Then, I teach students about the AAWWUBBIS. My friend, Cathy Byrd, a sixth-grade teacher at Rudder Middle School, let me in on the power of the AAWWUBBIS (As, Although, After, While, When, Unless, Because, Before, If, Since). The joy of this lesson comes with the AAWWUBBIS whoop, along the lines of a good Wahoo! AAWWUBBIS (A-WOOH-BIS)! Cathy tells her students that if they start a sentence with an AAWWUBBIS, they are almost guaranteed to have a comma in the sentence. I remind them that the comma never immediately follows the AAWWUBBIS. I tell them that they will hear or feel the pause when they read the sentence. I put the AAWWUBBIS list on the board. We practice orally. The students make up a

sentence beginning with an AAAWWUBBIS and tell me where they would put the comma. Later, students include at least one AAAWWUBBIS sentence in a longer piece they are working on in writer's workshop.

Later, Cathy teaches students how the AAAWWUBBIS part of the sentence is a fragment without the second part of the sentence. She says students "feel very mature when they realize how easily complex sentences can be written."

## Author's Word and Phrase Palette

The "Author's Word and Phrase Palette" section of the writer's notebook will be a collection. I morphed this strategy from Noden's (1999) "Artist's Image Palette." As students read, they record words or phrases that strike them for a myriad of reasons. I wanted to open this up to a collection that could be done all year. Collecting, categorizing, and marveling at words and combinations of words in their independent and assigned reading will help students develop an appreciation for the power of words. Later, students can create a piece of writing using the palette. Students may also want to look at their palettes when revising their papers for specific word choice. In this section, students collect the following:

- *Active verbs.* Writing snaps and sizzles when active, lively verbs are used. The specificity makes writing hum with voice and often creates sounds to delight in. Active verbs like *skitter* and *crackle* should fill a lot of the space in the author's palette, developing diction and increasing vocabulary.
- *Cool words.*
- *Phrases or combinations that work.* Maybe it's alliteration, maybe it's beautiful, maybe it's parallelism, such as this sentence. For whatever reason, these word combinations dance on the page or dive into our senses, allowing us to experience whatever it is the writer is expressing.
- *Contrasts/comparisons: similes, metaphors, sensory images, and others.* I ask students to look for something fresh, not stale like "faster than a speeding bullet," but new, original, and something to aspire to as a writer: [*This cake*] *tastes like vacuum cleaner fuzz* (Korman 2000, p. 2) or *Her open eye was like nearly black balsamic vinegar beading on white china* (Franzen 2001, p. 31). While reading *Birdland* by Tracy Mack (2003), I recorded these similes in my author's palette: *Her voice was rough, like a bus grinding its brakes* (p. 36) and *Leo's feet pad down the hallway like a soft drumbeat* (p. 66). While reading *The Truth About Sparrows* by Marian Hale (2004), I copied, *Sweat crawled all over me like ants* (p. 2). Whatever strikes me for whatever reason, I record it. I ask my students to do the

<b>The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini</b>	
<b>Active Verbs</b> peeking claws sparkled propelled glanced soared floating giggling mumble hand picked slung	<b>Smart Similes</b> <i>... a face like a Chinese doll chiseled from hardwood: his flat, broad nose and slanting, narrow eyes like bamboo leaves . . .</i> (p. 3) <i>Hassan never talked about his mother, as if she'd never existed.</i> (p. 6)
<b>Naming Names (Specific Nouns)</b> receiver Golden Gate Park alley afterthought chandelier	<b>Awesome Adjectives</b> frigid meaty slanting affluent grainy wrought-iron gates intricate mosaic tiles sprawling house vaulted ceiling mahogany table paper-thin layer of muscle scraggly legs

Figure 3.5 Teacher Model of Author's Word Palette

same. Noden (1999) suggests that we can use authors' words and phrases to inspire us to paint our words in our own writing.

For example, as I read *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (2003), I jotted down words and organized them into four categories. I placed the categories in the four quadrants of my author's palette and labeled the quadrants with the types of words I had found (see Figure 3.5). Categories can morph. I might have a list of how characters move, and so on. Later, kids return to this list and dip their pencils in the words and phrases and place them in their own writing. By categorizing words, we have a concrete way to stay in touch with parts of speech, emphasize function, and work on the writer's craft of word choice.

### Gems: Sentences and Paragraphs that Work

To distinguish the Author's Palette from the "Gems" section of the writer's notebook (Thomas 2000, Harwayne 1992), I tell students that "gems" will always be full sentences or more.

Instead of phrases or words that resonate with the reader, for this section I want students to hunt down sentences that work, strings of sentences, even

paragraphs that make the reader stop, bend over, pick up the gem and see it sparkle in the light from many angles. Gems make us pause and say, "How'd they do that?" By having them in a collection, writers can return to these gems and enjoy them again and again—a treasure trove of fluent, fierce writing worth a second look, worth imitating.

Because students choose what they like, this is much less a lesson in grammar or style than a lesson in art appreciation and collection. I ask students to dedicate one page of their writer's notebook to sentences with introductory phrases, one page to sentences with interrupting phrases, and one to those with closing phrases. This way the kids focus on the patterns rather than the labels, increasing the likelihood that the students will own these complex sentence structures and find them seeping into their writing, spilling over from the stores of good writing they are immersing themselves in. For younger or less experienced writers, it may be easier to have students record their sentences on strips of typing paper that you have pre-cut. That

way the kids can have more support when categorizing them. If a student gets stuck, I ask the class to help figure out which category the sentence fits in, while mediating the discussion with questions.

Of course, some sentences will fit in more than one category—a “combination platter,” if you will. When faced with this choice, students can highlight the part of the sentence they want to emphasize or make a new category altogether. See Figure 3.6 for an example of a combination platter and its choice for categorization.

## Becoming More Intentional with Sentence Pattern Collections

When I want to make the sentence patterns more explicit, I give students inserts for their writer's notebooks that have the general information about a pattern and some correct examples to start with. I found that when I had students copy down patterns from the overhead, sometimes errors were made and then they were being scaffolded with wrong information until I caught it in their notebooks. I found that creating the inserts with patterns, such as participles, prepositions, and absolutes, gives me a treasure trove of stylistic and grammatical devices that I can pull out at a moment's notice. At the beginning of the year, I run off all the patterns (templates for these cards are included in the Appendix). Then I cut them up into half pages and paper clip each one until I need it.

Once we look at some sentences that have *-ing* verbs and we start playing around with the structure, I can hand out the Comma Reinforcers on participles, and kids can glue them into their writer's notebooks at the top of a page. Beneath these headers, kids can collect samples from their favorite authors and other students, or in many cases from their own writing. See the Appendix and the lessons on individual devices in Part II for more information.

### A Combination Platter Served by Judy Moody

#### AAAWWWUBBIS/Opener

**While she munched**, Judy watched her little brother, Stink, hang stuff up on the refrigerator: his report card, the self portrait that made him look like a monkey, and a photo of himself in his flag costume, from the time he went to Washington D.C. without her.

#### Appositive/Interrupter

While she munched, Judy watched her little brother, **Stink**, hang stuff up on the refrigerator: his report card, the self portrait that made him look like a monkey, and a photo of himself in his flag costume, from the time he went to Washington D.C. without her.

#### Commas in a Series/Closer

While she munched, Judy watched her little brother, Stink, hang stuff up on the refrigerator: **his report card, the self portrait that made him look like a monkey, and a photo of himself in his flag costume, from the time he went to Washington D.C. without her.**

—Megan McDonald, *Judy Moody Gets Famous!* (pp. 13–14)

Figure 3.6 A Combination Platter

## More Writer's Notebook Tips

Here are some additional tips for handling and storing writer's notebooks as well as some excellent models and resources from which to garner more ideas.

### Handling the Notebooks

- *Do they go home?* I choose to leave the notebooks in the classroom, but if for any reason a notebook is missing, I allow the student to do the work and then glue it in the proper place in the writer's notebook later.
- *Storage?* To keep each class's notebooks organized, I have colored crates, labeled for each class. Some years I have had shelf space and then I use that.
- *What if they mess up?* If a big mistake happens in the notebook and it must be corrected or covered, glue a sheet, cut to fit, over the mistake. "Everything is fixable, except tearing out pages!"

### Models of Keeping Notebooks

Berne, Suzanne. *A Crime in the Neighborhood*.

Byrd, Robert. *Leonardo: Beautiful Dreamer*.

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey*.

Moss, Marissa. *Max's Logbook*.

Moss, Marissa. *Amelia's Notebook*.

Moss, Marissa. *My Notebook (with Help from Amelia)*.

Schotter, Roni. *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street*.

### Resources for Writer's Notebooks

Buckner, Aimee. *Notebook Know-How*.

Bomer, Randy. *Time for Meaning*.

Fletcher, Ralph. *A Writer's Notebook*.

Fletcher, Ralph. *Breathing In, Breathing Out: Keeping a Writer's Notebook*.

Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*.

Okay, about now, you're probably saying, "Wait a minute, what about the grammar and mechanics in the writer's notebook? With all this free movement, weaving, discovery, context, collections, and dancing around in the messiness of real writing, how do I systematize what I'm teaching? Where do I hold all this freewheeling knowledge, and how on earth can I ground this knowledge long enough to be etched in my students' individual repertoires?" All I have done so far is discuss how to construct the playground. The editor's checklist is my tool for helping students become systematic in integrating mechanics growth into their writing.

## Starting an Editor's Checklist

Because I want to be a responsive teacher, responding to my students' grammatical and mechanical needs as they arise, I have to strike a balance between what students may need at any given time and the overall blueprint of what my kids should know and be able to do when they walk out of my class at



the end of the year. The editor's checklist is an essential tool for meeting this goal in my classroom. This one tool can serve as a blueprint for the year, a placeholder, a record of your grammar and mechanics teaching.

I don't mean the editor's checklist found at the teacher supply store, or the lengthy list that comes with textbooks, or even the individual list that your students *don't* keep in their writing folders.

I bow down to worship any teacher who can get all of his or her students to keep their own personalized lists of idiosyncratic errors, but I could only keep up with these individualized checklists with my 150 students for about three weeks into the semester. I stress the word *I* because if I did not sit with individual students and tell them what they needed to work on, the lists were never made or added to or even referred to. It's just like when I corrected errors on their papers. I would hope that if I sat next to them, working one-on-one, they would learn new writing skills by my modeling.

Researchers tell us to teach skills in context. They tell us to conference for one-on-one instruction, but I had thirty other students who were clamoring for me to assist them as well. I wonder, do math teachers teach most skills one-on-one? These attempts at teaching mechanics didn't work because I never got to every kid. And I just deepened their dependence on some "other" authority instead of scaffolding them to tackle and reason with grammar and mechanics on their own.

Finally, I began keeping an organic editor's checklist: a system that grows from student writing and what research says kids have to know. In my class, we constantly move back and forth between the editor's checklist and writer's notebook.

On the first day of school, I hang a long piece of white butcher paper on the wall, in a spot everyone can see. If kids ask about it, I tell them this sheet is going to help them grow up and be ready for high school. If no one says anything, I say, "So when are y'all going to leave me alone about the white butcher paper?" I get puzzled looks. I love to puzzle my kids. I tell them their brains are growing.

On the second day, before school, I write across the top in big green letters *Editor's Checklist*.

"I think you are now ready for me to share with you," I say, pointing at the butcher paper, "the editor's checklist."

Audible groan. Just the word *editing* sends shivers down students' spines. Who can blame them? Especially when they are assuming it is probably just one more way to make writing like filling out a worksheet. Their adolescent brains downshift: One more way to be wrong; one more rule that doesn't make sense and doesn't apply to me; one more thing I couldn't care less about; one more thing to check off, be done with, so I can sit, talk, and write notes. When I have given my students a photocopied checklist in the past, that is, in fact, what they have done. They have checked off each box, one at

a time. Checklists mostly get us checks, not editing, but this organic editor's checklist is different.

"Have you ever seen an editor's checklist?" Most students say no, even though they probably have seen one in one form or another. "This chart is going to help us learn many of the important things to be adult writers. Writers' secrets, if you will." A good percentage of my middle school students want to be adults, so I shamelessly use this desire to manipulate them into caring about mechanics. "You're not a child anymore," I say, "but you're not an adult either. You're in between. One of the ways we make our writing more adult is to use punctuation marks correctly." I get a few smirks, but I have everyone's attention.

"Have you ever thought about why we have punctuation? Or better yet, why we have laws and rules everywhere we go?"

"So we won't get in trouble," offers Stephanie.

"Tell me more, Stephanie."

"Well, it's like we can't go through stop signs because there would be a crash."

"What other rules keep you safe?"

Albert's hand shoots up. "The pool over at San Pedro Park; there are these signs that say 'No Running.'"

"At Pecan Grove Apartments it says the same thing," adds Ramiro.

"Can anyone think of a pool where they want you to run?" I ask.

Silence envelops the room as they search their brains.

"I guess that rule is pretty standard." We talk about the conventions of eating at the table, restaurants, driving. After we have exhausted all the possible places where rules serve us, I ask, "Whom do you think invented conventions or rules for writing?"

"Teachers?" wonders Jeremy.

"Maybe there was this mean English teacher a long time ago who had a red pen for a hand," I say, holding my right arm stiff in front of me, thrashing it around in crossing-out motions. "And she just started marking up papers for fun, slashing them to bits."

"Whatever!" Sara says.

"No, it wasn't a mean old teacher with a red-pen hand. It was the writers. They wanted to be understood. Don't you want to be understood too? Grammar and mechanics are conventions. The word *convention* meant *agreement* in its original Latin form. You told me we had agreements or rules about eating, being at a pool, and so on. You said they told us how to act. Well, writers wanted people to understand what they said, even when they weren't around. They wanted people to understand their words so they started agreeing on things: A period means stop this thought; a capital letter signals that a new sentence is beginning or that a word is a name."

This discussion begins building the concept. Referring to the editor's checklist, I explain how we will learn more about how to follow the rules and

how following conventions of mechanics and grammar makes our writing easier to understand. And what middle school students want is to be understood—finally.

“Are you tired of nobody hearing you? Writing gives you that power, and part of writing’s power is in its passion, its details, but all of that is lost if the grammar and mechanics can’t hold the message together.”

Soon after, I read *Punctuation Takes a Vacation*. This whimsical picture book by Robin Pulver (2003) describes the plight of a class whose punctuation gets so sick and tired of being erased, left out, and moved around that all the punctuation marks rebel and go on vacation. The story and illustrations describe how much punctuation is missed. The book is one more way to stress the value of punctuation as a tool writers harness to communicate.

## Where Do I Begin My Editor’s Checklist?

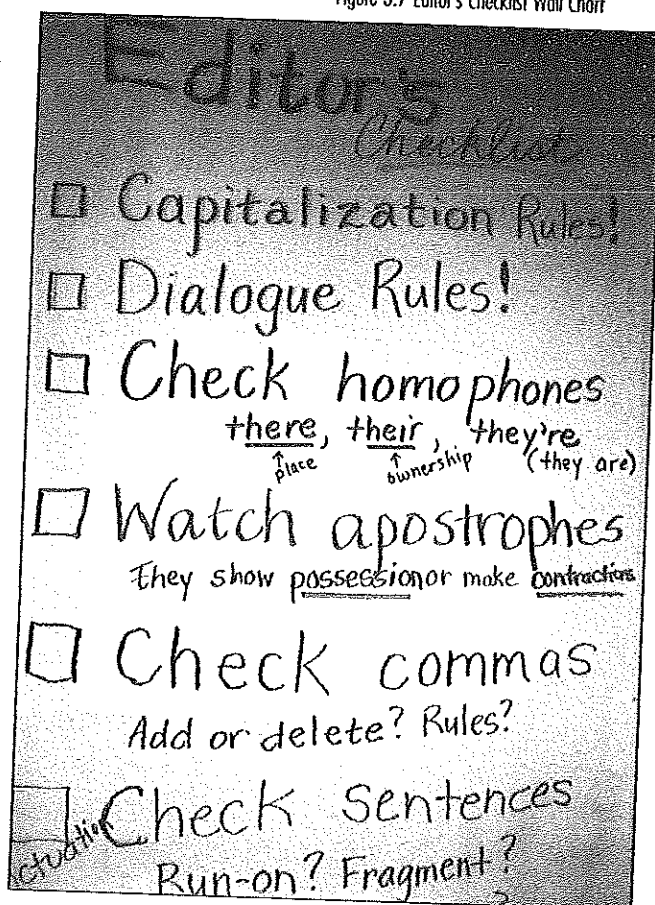
In truth, the editor’s checklist may only be semiorganic. While it grows from the hubris of student writing, it also incorporates my state standards along with Connors and Lunsford’s top twenty errors, listed in Chapter 1.

After I teach grammar and mechanics concepts through snippets of text or writers’ secrets, students help me list each rule on the editor’s checklist (see Figure 3.7). If appropriate, we add an annotation that reminds them of how to apply the rule and its purpose. It may be more appropriate to refer to another list posted in the room or to start a different wall chart. Figure 3.8 offers advice about which rules could go on the editor’s checklist and which could be posted separately. I find that posting capitalization rules and sentence patterns by themselves has several advantages. Separate lists serve as categorical organization for the high-priority rules and ensure that there is room left on the editor’s checklist for other important rules.

### The First Entry

At the beginning of the year, students complete form after form and label after label. One of the most useful rules to introduce at the beginning of the year is capitalization. I lit on capitalization to start my editor’s checklist because (1) its use is immediate,

Figure 3.7 Editor’s Checklist Wall Chart



### What Could Go on the Editor's Checklist?

What Could Go on the List?	What Could Get Its Own List?
Check capitalization	Capitalization
Check homophones	Word wall of homophones and frequently misspelled words
Check commas	Compound sentence patterns
Check pronouns	Complex sentence patterns
Check apostrophes	Serial comma patterns
Check subject-verb agreement	Pronouns
Check double negatives	Two-word sentences
Check dialogue	Verb tense
	Dialogue rules

Figure 3.8 What Could Go on the Editor's Checklist?

### Capitalization Rules!

1. Proper nouns  
(Rayburn Middle School, San Antonio, Brittany)
2. Proper Adjectives  
(English muffin, Sony television, Chinese food)
3. Title with a last name  
(Coach Anderson, President Lincoln)
4. First word in a direct quotation  
(Vanessa asked, "What can I write about?")
5. Titles  
(The Giver, Seventeen, King of the Hill)
6. Letter opening  
(Dear Mr. Chips,)
7. First word of a letter closing  
(Yours truly,)

Figure 3.9 Capitalization Rules!

and (2) the rules of capitalization are black and white and straightforward. Why start with something riddled with exceptions?

This way I can lull kids into believing that this grammar thing isn't so far out of reach.

I introduce the seven capitalization rules over several days by having students look at and create examples in the context of sentences, check their own work as well as others', and create a mini-rule book to keep in their writing folders. I then post the capitalization rules (see Figure 3.9).

Once the rules are understood, we are ready to be held accountable for capitalization. I walk over to the editor's checklist. "It's time for our first entry on our growing list of things to edit in our writing. From now on, every time you finish a piece of writing, instead of saying, 'I'm finished,' I want you to look at this list and reread your work, correcting it for capitalization." I write *Check capitalization* beneath the header *Editor's Checklist*. For other rules, we might make an annotation at the bottom of the list with key ideas to help spark our memories, but our high-priority capitalization rules have a separate poster. I remind kids that if they need more information, they can look at the capitalization poster.

Once we have zoomed in on a rule, how do we zoom back out? We go from looking at sentences to looking at paragraphs of our own writing and that of our peers. This needs to be a quick process, one that's easy and can be repeated with many mechanics concepts—if we're ever going to get those concepts in front of them enough, if we're ever going to get them to care and to know what to care about.

## Express-Lane Edits: Returning to Context

One thing all my students are familiar with is the express lane at the grocery store. Sometimes you don't have time to shop for everything. If you only need to get a carton of milk, you can go through the express lane and save time

and hassle. I try to take this familiar part of our weekly routines and merge it into editing tasks.

How often do we get bogged down in the totality of all that needs fixing so that editing becomes an ordeal for students as well as the teacher? What if we narrowed down our editing task to a few items? We'd be able to edit more often and more quickly and to make editing in context more a part of the everyday fabric of writer's workshop. In short, "express-lane edits" get my students rereading their work and thinking about how to edit their writing in ways that clarify their ideas. It is also my version of "Clean up on aisle 3!" It helps us focus on that editor's checklist, moving the principles into the writer's notebook. I can post anything on my classroom walls, but if I don't use it, my students won't, and they won't internalize the concepts.

Each student needs a piece of first-draft writing to begin—not a final copy or a completed essay, but a messy beginning like a writer's notebook entry or a freewrite. I use freewrites to get my students writing fluently; I use express-lane edits to get my students editing fluently.

First, as with most things, I model the process I want them to engage in. While students freewrite, I write an entry on a transparency. After the freewrite, I say, "I know many of you go to the store a lot. When you're in a hurry, which line do you go to?"

"The express lane."

"It's quick. You're in, you're out," I add. I explain that, like the routine they are used to at the store, I want them to become equally familiar with using express-lane edit as a way to reread their writing, a way to "check out" important items in their work.

"For example, we've been talking about apostrophes—when to insert and when to delete them. I want to show you a quick way to deal with this editing item. I call it the express-lane edit."

I turn the overhead on, revealing my freewrite (see Figure 3.10). "Let's take the freewrite we did on neighbors," I say. "Now, before I read it, I need to make my shopping list." Beneath my writing, on the left half of the transparency I draw a box.

"We have to decide what's going to go in the box—a sort of shopping list." I write *Items to "Check Out"* at the top of the box (see Figure 3.10).

### Neighbor Freewrite—Express-Lane Edit Example

When I was five, I wished our neighbor, Mrs. Harrison, were my mother. I wanted to ride around Nederland in Mrs. Harrison's Ford LTD station wagon. It's sides had wood panels and the station wagon's cargo area in back had a trundle seat that pulled up from the floor and made a bench. I coveted that sunken bench, forest green with its own tiny push button seatbelt.

Mom's car was just a boring Plymouth—no wood panels, no trundle seat, no Mrs. Harrison with her sweet perfume and frosted blonde hair. Just our plain old Plymouth and my plain old Mom who smelled like cigarettes and Jergen's hand lotion. She's never going to be like the other Moms, I remember thinking to myself.

#### Items to "Check Out"

- Apostrophes  
Use apostrophes to show ownership except with pronouns (hers, its) Only use apostrophes with pronouns if you are making a contraction (he's = he is, it's = it is)
- Capitalization

#### Receipt

I changed *Harrisons* to *Harrison's* by inserting an apostrophe because the *apostrophe s* shows it was *Mrs. Harrison's LTD*.

I changed *it's* to *its* because *it's* = *it is*, and I meant ownership. Don't use apostrophes with pronouns unless you want a contraction!

Figure 3.10 Neighbor Freewrite—Express-Lane Edit Example

Think-Aloud Example	
The Writing on the Overhead	What I Say Aloud to Show My Thinking Process
When I was five, I wished our neighbor, Mrs. Harrison, were my mother. I wanted to ride around Nederland in Mrs. <del>Harrisons</del> Ford LTD station wagon. <del>It's</del> sides had wood panels and the station wagon's cargo area in back had a trundle seat that pulled up from the floor and made a seat. I coveted that forest green seat, with its own tiny seatbelt. Mom's car was just a boring Plymouth—no wood panels . . .	<p>"Okay, I see that I was trying to show whose Ford it was, and we use apostrophes to show ownership. So I need to change <i>Harrisons</i> to <i>Harrison's</i>, adding an apostrophe. Now I need to write that in my receipt box."</p> <p>"I see another apostrophe on <i>it's</i>. I know people always make mistakes with <i>it's</i> so I need to really think about this. An apostrophe shows ownership, but wait. (I walk over to my wall chart on apostrophes.) That's right, they can show contractions, too. And <i>it's</i> means <i>it is</i>. I don't mean that here. I am not saying 'It is sides.' (I point to the poster.) That's right. Never use apostrophes with possessive pronouns. Apostrophes with pronouns mean contractions, never possession. I need to write this change in my receipt box."</p> <p>[I also think aloud about the other apostrophes as well, letting students tell me why they are correct or incorrect.]</p>

Figure 3.11 Think-Aloud Example

"Since we just added apostrophes to our editor's checklist, let's 'check out' our freewrites for apostrophes. Should we insert or delete any?" I write *apostrophes* in my box. Students copy the box, title, and word *apostrophes* beneath their freewrites in their writer's notebooks. This is the perfect time for a quick review; I have students copy a few details about apostrophes that we have been discussing (see Figure 3.10). Next, we draw another box to the right of the *Items to "Check Out"* box. "The box on the right is titled *Receipts*. In this box, you show me your changes."

"Now we're ready to do the express-lane edit. Before you try, I will show you how to do it using my writing." I read over the text, making my invisible thinking process visible by thinking aloud—modeling my problem-solving process. Figure 3.11 shows some "think-aloud" comments I make while modeling.

As I make changes, I add each change to my "Receipts" box. I model using the language our state test uses, including *insert* and *delete*. Then I have students do the express-lane edit on their own writing. If they find nothing to change, they read it a second time. If students still find no mistakes, they read the writing backwards, word by word, like some journalists do. If they find nothing at all to correct, they write *I found no errors after reading the above writing three times*, followed by their signature. This way everyone always has a receipt.

As an extension, I may cue students to use a specific convention or grammatical construction before they begin their freewrite. Then whatever they were cued to use will be our focus in the express-lane edit.

While the students reread their work for the express-lane edit, I like to play music. A perfect piece for this is “The Typewriter” by Leonard Slatkin, which is easily and inexpensively available on the iTunes Web site. Music does much to change the affect of these mechanics-rich experiences.

If students are only rereading their work, we are making a step in the right direction. What’s really funny is that kids, when limited to what they should edit, for some reason love to edit for something you didn’t list. “Sir, I spelled a word wrong. Can I fix that?” I respond, as if I am doing them a favor, “Well, I guess.” Again, if the only benefit they get from this is rereading, then that’s a start. And, if I am calling their attention to an important concept in a real context, that’s even better. If they actually integrate an apostrophe consciousness into their rereading and rechecking process, Hallelujah! That’s the goal.

The express-lane edit is a class ritual that can be done with or without partners and gives us the ever-important repetition in a meaningful context.

## Comma Reinforcers: Cut-and-Paste Mini-Handbooks for the Writer’s Notebook

Because the comma is the most used punctuation mark (Connors and Lunsford 1997), I have found that commas need to be reinforced more than any other punctuation mark. I developed comma mini-handbooks called “comma reinforcers” that can be pasted into the writer’s notebooks one pattern at a time. In the Appendix, there are six comma patterns with the support of student-friendly definitions and examples from literature. These include comma patterns for participles, absolutes, appositives, adjectives out of order, subordinating conjunctions (AAAWWUBBIS), and prepositional phrases. (See Figure 3.12 for an example of the participle comma reinforcer. It shows one of the comma reinforcers found in the Appendix. Each pattern can be pasted in the writer’s notebooks for additional reinforcement of commas.)

I like to photocopy all of the comma reinforcers at the beginning of the year. I cut them into individual patterns and paper clip each stack together until I need to use one of them in class to support writers. I then have ready-to-go comma reinforcers. Kids paste them into their notebooks. They work well at the top of each page of collections in the

Figure 3.12 Cut-and-Paste Comma Reinforcers

### Use Comma(s)

#### Participles

Participles and participial phrases are *-ing* verbs and *-ed* verbs that evoke action and movement in our sentences, either to start a phrase or have a series. (Participles can be *-en* verbs, too.)

***Wishing it were cooler and wishing she weren’t hungry, Franny Davis stood in line at the school cafeteria door, fingering the lunch pass in her pocket.*** (p. 1)

—Mary Stolz, *The Noontday Friends*

***The bus motor idles, putting out a long tornado of blue smoke.*** (p. 6)

—Chuck Palahniuk, *Choke*

***Burping, growing, throwing, running—everything is a race.*** (p. 6)

—Jerry Spinelli, *Loser*

"Gems" section of the writer's notebook, making sure that kids have correct information at their fingertips for easy reference. I like my kids to keep collections of stunning sentences that can fit under each pattern.

In the Appendix, I have also included many other mini-handbook entries that can be cut and pasted into the writer's notebook whenever writers need extra support. Not every student will become fluent with every pattern. But each student will have support, a reference, and a place to play, collect, and experiment with grammar and mechanics. Gluing these tools right into the middle of the writer's notebook means inserting them directly into the context of daily writing.